

## **Press Release**

*For more information, please call Lisa Schmidt at 406-278-0159 or Tom Daubert at 406-449-2095*

### **Bluetongue Confirmed in Sheep; Quarantine Extended**

Sheep producers in 16 Montana counties are not allowed to move their sheep within or beyond their county lines until October 10 because of a recent bluetongue outbreak.

“Test results on Tuesday confirmed bluetongue in sheep from Musselshell County, and we’ve gotten reports of sick sheep and preliminary test results from several additional counties so I’ve chosen to expand the hold order to also include Big Horn, Carter, Carbon, Custer, Fallon, Fergus, Garfield, Golden Valley, Petroleum, Powder River, Prairie, Rosebud, Stillwater, Treasure and Yellowstone Counties,” said State Veterinarian Dr. Marty Zaluski.

Bluetongue had already been confirmed in whitetail deer from the area last week.

The disease spreads when a gnat bites an infected animal and then bites a healthy animal. Sheep, whitetail deer and antelope are especially susceptible to bluetongue; the virus may cause death if these species are exposed. Cattle, goats, mule deer and elk also can contract the disease, but rarely show symptoms and are a much lower risk in spreading the disease, said Zaluski. Humans are not susceptible.

“I extended my order to keep all sheep in high-risk counties right where they are in an effort to protect livestock producers and prevent the movement of potentially sick animals into other states,” said Zaluski. “Bluetongue can be economically expensive and emotionally demoralizing. The Department of Livestock wants to do all it can to reduce the risk of spreading this virus.”

Zaluski implemented a 30-day hold order for Musselshell County on Sept. 10, after screening tests indicated bluetongue was the likely cause of several sheep deaths. He extended the hold order geographically today, but did not extend the timeframe.

“We expect a killing frost by October 9 and that should reduce the risk of spreading bluetongue significantly,” Zaluski said. As State Veterinarian, Zaluski has the authority to extend the hold order if new cases continue to appear or if a frost has not occurred in that region by October 9.

Producers should inspect their sheep frequently to look for signs of the virus. Common symptoms of bluetongue include a crusty, swollen muzzle, lesions or bleeding in the mouth or on the skin and, sometimes, lameness. In sheep, the mouth can become swollen and the tongue can swell and turn blue color because of damage to blood vessels and lack of oxygen. This dirty blue-colored tongue gives the disease its name—bluetongue. Livestock producers also should look for the following signs of the disease:

